

ACT ONE
SCENE I

TIME: Sixth Century. A spring Twilight. SCENE: Before a cave near the top of a bit of rising ground in the Downs, in Sussex, England. Bright green grass, bent low in a gusty wind; a few chalky boulders, some gorse bushes, but no trees. Entrances to paths up R. and down L.I. In the distance the towers of a walled town are visible, surrounded by more rolling hills, enclosing at the Right, and far off, a deep arm of the sea. The entrance to the cave, L.2, is partly concealed by gorse and stones, on one of which the MOTHER of three young dragons sits comfortably watching her children at play. AT.RISE: ZAR, the littlest dragon, is practicing ramping, which consists in running round and round in a wide circle and sending waves and ripples of movement all the way up the spine. ZAR is covered with shining blue scales and the effect is particularly pleasing. ALEXANDER AUGUSTUS, in the Center of the stage, is busy making marks on a chalky white stone. (You have often seen marks like these on stones and doubtless wondered what they are. They are Dragon Poems, such as ALEXANDER is now composing.) MEHITABEL, his sister, is looking over his shoulder. Their MOTHER sits knitting.

ALEXANDER. (To himself) "On the hill, the silly sheep."

MOTHER. (To ZAR, who has just made a beautiful circle with his tail) You see, you do it nicely when you try. Mehitabel, Alexander Augustus! Come and watch your little brother ramp! Ramp again, Zar, darling. (She knits placidly.)

MEHITABEL. (Coming to her MOTHER'S side) Dear Mother.

ALEXANDER. (Walking up and down) What rhymes with "sheep"?

ZAR. (Stopping in the middle of a ramp and putting his claws to his stomach) Mother, I'm hungry!

MOTHER. Now, Alexander, why did you mention sheep?

ALEXANDER. (Over his shoulder; abstractedly) I only wanted to know a rhyme.

MEHITABEL. I'm hungry, too.

MOTHER. Well, no wonder. None of our meals are regular any more. It used to be that every day, as soon as the sun came up, we could go to our rock and find two sheep waiting. But since your uncle came, nothing is like it used to be!

ZAR. Uncle Golgol surely can ramp and stamp -- and when he spits fire, you can hardly see the sun!

MOTHER. That's just the trouble. I don't like to speak ill of a guest, but I must confess his manners are distinctly un-English! No self-respecting English dragon would act as he does. It is going to make trouble.

MEHITABEL. (Mournfully) Nothing is the same. The neighbors have stopped bringing sheep.

ALEXANDER. (Leaving his rock) I wouldn't blame the neighbors, if I were you. Uncle Golgol has taken all their sheep. He eats too much! (He opens his mouth very wide in imitation of his uncle. ZAR laughs a funny little dragon laugh.)

MOTHER. Don't be vulgar, Alexander.

ALEXANDER. But it's true.

MOTHER. (Sadly) It is true. Your uncle is inclined to be greedy. He hasn't been in these parts a week and already sheep are getting scarce.

MEHITABEL. (Peering out L.I. over the downs) I can't see any grazing on the hills.

MOTHER. None were bound on our rock this morning. I dreaded to tell Golgol.

ZAR. I heard him puffing and snorting when he woke up this morning.

MOTHER. He has a terrible temper. Before I got him pacified he had eaten three shepherds off the Downs and swallowed down a Druid right off the castle walls. (She motions ALEXANDER to hold her ball of yarn; begins to wind.)

MEHITABEL. After all, even if Uncle Golgol is a relative, no one can blame us for the way he carries on.

MOTHER. The neighbors will never understand. They think all dragons are alike -- and our reputation on the Downs was really good.

ALEXANDER. (Dropping the yarn, excitedly) "Golgol, the Trouble-Maker!" There's a good title for a story. (He goes back to his writing.)
MEHITABEL comes to her MOTHER'S rescue. They restore the ball of yarn.)

MOTHER. All day long the shepherds and their womenfolk have climbed the hill to the castle wall. I have heard cries and sounds of weeping. I am afraid your uncle is the cause of this terror.

MEHITABEL. Don't worry, Mother.

MOTHER. You don't know humans. If they once decide that dragons are enemies of the human race, our peaceful life will be over.

ALEXANDER. We could explain.

MOTHER. As well try to explain to a cyclone.

MEHITABEL. I know the best thing to do. We must just send Uncle Golgol home!

MOTHER. Alas! The laws of hospitality say nothing about sending guests home. I don't believe it can be done. Our days will be filled with spitting fire and vanquishing knights who attack us.

ZAR. (Ramping joyously) I like a fight!

MOTHER. (Remembering her maternal duties with a start) Zar, it's past your bedtime! (Putting her knitting firmly away.)

ZAR. Let me have one more ramp.

MOTHER. Well -- just one!

MEHITABEL. Let's play a game; let's play "Saints and Dragons."

ZAR. Bid to be a dragon!

MEHITABEL. Me, too!

MOTHER. Mehitabel! Your grammar!

MEHITABEL. Sorry, Mother -- no time for grammar; have to play "Saints and Dragons"! Alexander, you have to be the saint. Watch out -- we're after you! (They try to catch ALEXANDER)

ALEXANDER. (Lazily but skillfully managing to keep out of the way of the two spirited dragons) You two always want to win. If I have to be the saint, let's let the saint catch the dragon! Humans do sometimes beat dragons!

MEHITABEL. (Stopping short) Whoever heard!

ZAR. (His pointed ears lifted in scorn) Humans beat dragons -- why, you might as well say!

ALEXANDER. Mother, I think you ought to tell them.

MOTHER. Tell them?

ALEXANDER. About Father.

MOTHER. Oh, Alexander, Zar is so young and Mehitabel is just a tender girl.

ALEXANDER. They'd have more respect for humans!

MOTHER. How did you know? You were just a child yourself!
(MEHITABEL and ZAR have been amusing themselves flipping.)

ALEXANDER. I remember very well -- my father lying dead and the heel of a man resting on his body.

ZAR. (Drawing closer to hear, and speaking in an awed voice) My own father killed by a little old human!

MOTHER. (Gently) You are too young to understand, but accidents happen, and sometimes humans get help from the gods. Didn't Golgol say that Wotan himself gave Siegfried a sword so that he could kill great Fafner?

ALEXANDER. What rhymes with Fafner?

MEHITABEL. (Thinking) Pafner -- snafner -- grafner. I don't know. Come on and play.

MOTHER. (Stamping her foot) How like his father! Rhymes, rhymes, rhymes! Perhaps they ought to know! (The children start off to play again. She beckons them determinedly to her side) Your ancestor, my children, was indeed killed by a human, by none other than Perseus, beloved of the gods of Greece.

ZAR. A little old human without any scales!

ALEXANDER. (Looking on both sides of the question) But you must remember that Perseus did have that invisible cap, and when he put it on nobody, not even Father, could see to strike him down.

MOTHER. It wouldn't have mattered. Your father could have enveloped the creature in green fire, cap and all!

MEHITABEL. That would have been splendid!

MOTHER. But in the midst of the fight Perseus shouted out a word, useful in a poem.

ZAR. (In disgust) A poem! (Ramps half-heartedly.)

MOTHER. Your parent stood on the white shore, lost in admiration of a rhyme, and forgot to fight at all until the Greek had pierced him to the heart. He fell with a sound that shook the very rocks, while Perseus snatched off his cap invisible and showed himself victor before all the world. I was overcome by grief and, sinking to the floor of the dark cavern that was our home, lay insensible for many moons.

ZAR. (Beginning to cry) I wish I had been there. I'd have killed that Perseus.

MOTHER. You were all mere babes. You were not out of your cradle -- just a tiny lizard of a dragon.

MEHITABEL. Poor Mother. Is that why you brought us over the seas alone?
ALEXANDER starts to speak -- thinks better of it and walks up and down, his paws clasped behind his back)

MOTHER. Over the wide seas, here to England. For of course no dragon will remain where a relative of his has been killed.

MEHITABEL. No, I suppose not.

MOTHER. It's never done. But what a death for the noble creature that was your father! (She buries her face in her paws.)

ALEXANDER. (Abruptly) Mother, there is one thing I would like to ask.

MOTHER. Yes, my son. (A pause.)

ALEXANDER. Do you know -- can you remember -- the word that Perseus spoke? (ZAR snorts in disgust.)

MOTHER. (Sighing) Alexander Augustus, how right I was to name you after your father's side of the family! (A confused NOISE is heard over the hill in the distance.)

ZAR. This is how I would have spit fire at Perseus, and ramped! (He

prepares to spit fire, blowing up his cheeks like a bellows.)

MOTHER. Hush, I hear a noise.

ALEXANDER. It sounds like humans.

MEHITABEL. It might be Uncle Golgol.

MOTHER. Be still. (She listens) Quickly to bed!

MEHITABEL. Let's send Uncle Golgol home over the ocean.

ALEXANDER. Let him go eat the fishes in the sea.

(ALEXANDER whispers to MEHITABEL and opens his mouth very wide, pantomiming his uncle's greediness. They go into the cave, laughing. ZAR ramps all around the rock and finally with a double backward ramp goes into the cave. MOTHER looks out anxiously.)

MEHITABEL. (Coming to door of cave) Sing to us, Mother -- a lullaby.

(The MOTHER sits at the door of the cave and begins to sing)

THE DRAGON LULLABY

Sleep, little dragon, and smooth your scales;
Sleep, little lizard,
In calm or in blizzard,
Roll down your eyelids and curl up your tails.

Hush-a-by, hush-a-by,
See the sheep rush-a-by,
Now is the time for small dragons to sleep.
So, hush-a-by, hush-a-by,
Hush, little lizard, and count all the sheep.

(SOUNDS of scuffling are heard within the cave, and dragon LAUGHTER. The MOTHER jumps up and starts to enter the cave to chide her children. She pauses on the threshold, shaking her head.)

MOTHER. Well, I suppose children will be children after all. (She goes into the cave. Silence. Then the rest of the lullaby is heard from within.)

Sleep, little dragon, a year or a day;
Sleep, little ramper,
You fiery young stamper.
Draw in your claws and tuck them away.

Hush-a-by, hush-a-by,
See the sheep rush-a-by,
Now is the time for small dragons to sleep.
So hush-a-by, hush-a-by,
Hush, little lizard, and count all the sheep.

(The LIGHT slowly fades throughout the rest of this scene. The NOISE from over the hill grows louder, and from the Right a strange procession appears. First a DRUID PRIEST in white robes, followed by a YOUTH, carrying a goatskin bag filled with wands. After him a SHEPHERD, in whose arm is a lamb. A KNIGHT -- SIR BODELOC -- follows, in green tunic and plumed helmet of brass.)

SHEPHERD. The Dragon Stone for sure!

SIR BODELOC (Puffing) Would that the gods had commanded a less distant hill for the ceremonies! This climb has cost me my breath.

DRUID. Be more reverent, Sir Bodeloc, of the place of sacrifice. Go attend the King.

SHEPHERD. Lor! How he toils up the hill!

(SIR BODELOC goes reluctantly back down the hill. He appears after a moment in company with the old KING, in embroidered tunic and crown of gold. Confused murmurs as they approach, then silence. The PRIEST stops before the great stone and, bowing low, waits for the OTHERS to group themselves around him.)

ACOLYTE. There's good grass here!

SHEPHERD. Lor! No wonder!

(The SHEPHERD stopping down to feed the lamb some grass. SIR BODELOC nonchalantly leans against the entrance of the dragon's cave. The ACOLYTE of the priestly craft kneels with his back to the audience, holding up the goat-skin bag. The KING stands in quiet dignity near the DRUID.)

KING. Is this the place?

DRUID. Humbly and on foot we have come to the Dragon Stone. Bowing low before the fearsome monster's cave -- (SIR BODELOC moves hurriedly away) -- from whence the gods have seen fit to send the ravaging beast that has destroyed our flocks.

SHEPHERD. Don't forget about the shepherds, too.

DRUID. (Frowning at the interruption) Bowing low before the home of Golgol, the destroyer, who took this day a Druid from off the very castle wall -- (The SHEPHERD starts to speak) -- not to mention lesser folk.

KING. (Plucking the sleeve of the DRUID) Bid the dragons remember our long years of sacrifice.

SHEPHERD. Two sheep every single day. We didn't begrudge them, either.

DRUID. (Loudly and firmly) Bowing low to the gods who have sent this scourge, we beg them to accept our sacrifice.

SIR BODELOC. And high time to ask the advice of the gods after the destruction Golgol wrought this day!

DRUID. To stay the ravages of the monster, one ewe lamb we bring -- the last that remains to us of all our rich flocks.

SHEPHERD. Poor little beastly, that must be eat so soon. (he brings the lamb forward, but the DRUID raises his hand to stay him.)

DRUID. Wait -- the gods have commanded further sacrifice. One ewe lamb we bring, together with a maiden young and pure, to be chosen as the augury commands, upon this hill by the sign of the goatskin wand!

KING. A maiden -- alas, that the gods have need of a maiden!

DRUID. (Raising up his hand solemnly) May the gods take our sacrifice!

ALL. May the gods take our sacrifice! (SHEPHERD tries to give DRUID the lamb. He is ignored.)

DRUID. Come close, oh, King! Here before the goat-skin bag! No -- closer -- you are too faraway -- everything must be just so. As I call the names of maidens in yon castle walls do you draw the wands from out that bag!

SHEPHERD. (To SIR BODELOC) The King is going to choose!

SIR BODELOC. It's not the King's choice, you fool. Of all the sticks in that bag one only bears the green leaf of immortal life --

SHEPHERD. You mean -- one of them sticks tells who should die!

DRUID. One name will be chosen for the sacrifice. One maid shall save the town.

SHEPHERD. Lor!

KING. Call out the names -- I will draw the wand --

DRUID. (Looking far off with a rapt expression) Cleolinda, daughter of Sir Bois!

KING. Shall I draw, thus? (The KING draws out a barren stick, which he holds up for the DRUID to see)

SHEPHERD. There's no leaf there, that's certain!

DRUID. The gods reject this maiden for the sacrifice and give her back to life!

KING. Let another name be called.

DRUID. Prudence, daughter of John, the rat-catcher.

KING. (Draws another wand, holding it high) Bare of green! (He lays down the stick.)

DRUID. Katherine, of the red hair, that is Sigurd's daughter.

SIR BODELOC. She has such a shrewish tongue, she could talk Golgol out of his evil way.

DRUID. Be silent and wait the will of the gods. (The KING draws another wand.)

SIR BODELOC. It is bare!

KING. What if none has the green leaf? What if the gods accept no sacrifice?

DRUID. Have you forgot the augury! What the gods promise they fulfill. I call Alcyon, daughter of the King!

KING. Not her -- call not her name. Call not Alcyon the Beloved!

SIR BODELOC. Forsooth, let the gods be satisfied with a maid less beautiful than Alcyon!

DRUID. Silence! The gods commanded every name be called until one should be chosen. (To the KING) Draw a wand!

KING. (Putting his hand out) My hand trembles so I cannot draw the stick.

DRUID. Draw! (The King draws forth a wand with a leaf of green.)

SHEPHERD. The gods forgive all common folk -- the Princess' wand is green.

KING. My daughter, my little daughter!

DRUID. (To his ACOLYTE) Fetch Alcyon, the daughter of the King. (ACOLYTE exits R.)

ACOLYTE. (Rises and looks about in amazement) The Princess!

SIR BODELOC. Alycon that I have thought to wed!

DRUID. There is no time to waste. Even now the dragon may be seizing priests from the very temple!

SHEPHERD. Or shepherds off the Downs.

KING. (To DRUID) Draw again; mayhap there are other wands of green. The Princess shall not die!

DRUID. The will of the gods must be done. Alcyon is chosen.

KING. Take gold and silver -- all that I have -- and let me keep my daughter!

DRUID. What is just for one if just for all. Thy daughter must be given to the dragon, else we all suffer death.

KING. Draw the name of another maid and I will make you high priest of the castle!

DRUID. (Sternly) The will of the gods is above the desire of Kings.

KING. Will no one save the Princess Alcyon? I will give half my kingdom to him who will remain by her side to give combat to the dragon!

SIR BODELOC. Though it cost me a hundred wounds, I will try to win this rich prize. (He flourishes his sword. At this moment GOLGOL'S roar is heard a great way off -- or perhaps the sound is only distant thunder. At any rate SIR BODELOC drops his sword with a clatter.)

SHEPHERD. (Clutching his lamb) An' that be Golgol!

SIR BODELOC. (Starting back down the hill up R.) Though rich the prize, I prize my life above it!

(At the summit of the hill SIR BODELOC meets ALCYON, led by the young ACOLYTE, and followed by her old NURSE, carrying a blue cloak.)

ALCYON. (Seeing SIR BODELOC) Have you come to save us?

SIR BODELOC. (Muttering) The will of the gods must be done. (He goes off.)

KING. (Clinging to her, overcome with grief) My daughter!

NURSE. (Grumbling) A fine King that gives his own child to the dragon! Did her mother give her in my care for this?

DRUID. The will of the gods be done.

NURSE. Aye, and a fine priest, too, though I am poor and ignorant that say it.

DRUID. Silence!

ALCYON. (Looking around) Is this the rock? Must I be chained here? Look, yonder, I can see the castle wall. There, my falcon waits within his cage. He will wait for me in vain.

DRUID. The gods have spoken.

ALCYON. Fear not. I am ready.

DRUID. You have yet the night to live. The dragon eats at dawn. (WARN CURTAIN.)

KING. I will stay in your stead. Let the dragon take my life! I am old, my days are few. (To the DRUID) Let me die.

DRUID. (Making mysterious signs above ALCYON'S head) Old Man, do you dare to question the decree of the gods? (Exit KING, R., tottering brokenly down the hill.) The light grows dim. Let all return at once to the safety of the castle walls -- save only this maiden whom I have appointed for the sacrifice.

SHEPHERD. And my lamb. Don't forget my lamb.

(The DRUID binds ALCYON to the rock with a heavy chain. The NURSE, who has hovered about her, puts a cloak over her shoulders.)

NURSE. (Fastening ALCYON'S cloak about her) Put on your cloak -- the night air do be damp and chill.

DRUID. (Sternly) Go -- attend the King--

NURSE. My pet -- my Alcyon! (Exits R.)

(DRUID takes the lamb from the SHEPHERD and signals him to go. The SHEPHERD leaves. The DRUID silently begins to bind the lamb to the other side of the rock. ALCYON holds out her hands beseechingly. The DRUID puts the lamb in her arms. Exit DRUID, R., solemnly, followed by ACOLYTE, bearing the goat-skin bag.)

ALCYON. (To lamb) It grows dark, but we are not afraid of the dark.

(Re-enter R. the young ACOLYTE, holding out a dandelion gone to seed.)

ACOLYTE. It's a dandelion. You blow on it and it tells the time o'day -- or night. I thought you might like it -- it'll be less lonesome like.

(ALCYON takes the flower, but does not trust herself to speak. The ACOLYTE runs out. ALCYON is left alone.) CURTAIN.

ACT ONE
SCENE II

TIME: Dawn. SCENE: Same as Scene I. AT RISE: ALCYON sits forlorn on the Dragon Rock, the lamb sleeping at her feet. She draws her cloak about her.

ALCYON. This is the morning wind that blows away the dark. I will cover my eyes and shut out the rising sun. (She covers her eyes, then raises her head in quick terror) How quiet the Downs at daybreak! I have heard the monster has a mouth like a whale and a throat as big as the sacred oak! Oh, wretched Alcyon, wherefore are the fates so cruel? (She takes the lamb up in her arms) Is there no one among the gods or mortals to offer aid? Alone and defenseless am I. I think that I will pray. (To the lamb, as she puts it on the ground again) Stay close to me you little thing. (She kneels awkwardly because of the chain that binds her.)

(Unseen by ALCYON, ST. GEORGE enters from the L., behind the gorse bushes that surround the cave at the brow of the hill closest to the sea. He is a young Knight, slender but fully armed in armor of silver, with a white plume in his helmet. A wand of silver is thrust in his sword belt, near his sword. He looks around, but at first does not see ALCYON.)

ST. GEORGE. I heard voices here. Whether friend or foe I know not. If friend, 'tis well -- if foe, I have my sword.

ALCYON. (Praying) Oh, Immortal Gods, that once delivered Ariadne when Theseus left her to perish in the islands of the sea, if any pity moves you, hear the laments of your Alcyon.

ST. GEORGE. Why, this is a damsel chained, if I see aright, to that great rock!

ALCYON. (Jumping up in fright) What stirred those bushes? (To the lamb) The dragon comes! Let us close our eyes and die without looking on the monstrous sight. (She hides her eyes, weeping.)

ST. GEORGE. (Coming forward) Why do you weep?

ALCYON. (Sees him) The Gods have sent help! (She looks at him again compassionately) Alas, no! He is too slender and too young to fight so fierce a monster as this Golgol. This is only some stranger who has lost him way upon the Downs.

ST. GEORGE. Why do you wait alone upon this barren spot?

ALCYON (She takes the lamb in her arms) I wait my death.

ST. GEORGE. (Drawing his sword) Whatever danger threatens, fear no longer!

ALCYON. (Shaking her head) Go your way, Young Man, lest you perish also. Know that in this very cave a dragon lives. To him my life is forfeit. Go away, quickly.

ST. GEORGE. Not I!

ALCYON. You cannot overcome the monster. You would but die in vain.

ST. GEORGE. Is this beast you fear called Golgol? Has he come lately from the sea?

ALCYON. Golgol in very truth -- but who are you? Have known you of this thing?

ST. GEORGE. Fear nothing. Have faith. I have come to help you.

(From the Left, the approach of the DRAGON is heard.)

ALCYON. The dragon! You will be slain!

ST. GEORGE. I will go to meet him! I will bar his path. (He runs off Left, sword drawn for combat.)

(SOUNDS of fighting and a cloud of smoke fill the stage. A dragon's ROAR and then the voice of ST. GEORGE, singing his battle song)

"Oh, here comes I, Saint George,
A man of courage bold!"

(The ROAR of the DRAGON is heard again, confused sounds drawing closer.)

ALCYON. (Straining to see) The monster! Those fangs! Golgol will tear the stranger limb from limb. How his sword flashes! The smoke blinds me. I cannot see. I cannot hear his voice. (Looking down at the lamb) No need for you to perish, Little Beast. (She puts the lamb down behind the stone where it cannot be seen) It is enough that we should die!

ST. GEORGE. (In distance) "A man of courage bold."

ALCYON. Alive! The knight is still alive! (ST. GEORGE steps backward into view from Left, warding off the oncoming DRAGON. They circle about the stage, fighting.) The sight is too awful. (She hides her eyes. ST. GEORGE drives the DRAGON back, step by step. At last with one great sword thrust ST. GEORGE pierces a vital spot. The DRAGON staggers backward off the scene to the Left, ST. GEORGE following him. The sound of a painful ROAR is heard, then a falling body.)

(At this moment the KING totters, breathless, up the hill from R., armed with unsheathed sword too heavy for his strength.)

KING. Where -- is -- the -- monster? We heard his roars; by the smoke we knew him near.

ALCYON. Alas!

KING. If I cannot save my child -- I will not live.

ST. GEORGE. (Enters) Yonder lies the dragon, dead. (The KING stands dazed.)

ALCYON. We are saved, Father. Do you hear?

KING. My daughter, my little daughter. (He tries to unbind the PRINCESS. ST. GEORGE approaches to help him.)

ALCYON. (Kneeling to ST. GEORGE) That I live is thy gift, oh Sainly Victor! (ST. GEORGE raises her up.)

SIR BODELOC. (Enters R., heavy with armor, carrying in each hand a long spear. Blustering) Where is this monster that I may vanquish it!

ALCYON. You have grown courageous too late, Sir Bodeloc.

ST. GEORGE. The dragon is dead.

SIR BODELOC. Who has dared?

KING. (Ignoring SIR BODELOC) Who are you, that has delivered my daughter from the decree of the gods and my kingdom from ruin?

ST. GEORGE. George of Cappadocia, am I.

ALCYON. The song you sang called you saint.

KING. An humble soul in a noble body. Thou art a good man, I can see.

SIR BODELOC. And a fortunate one that has saved a king's daughter.

ST GEORGE. At my birth my mother died and I was stolen not long afterward by the enchantress, Kalyb.

KING. The witch of the silver wand! I have heard of her!

ST. GEORGE. For seventeen years she kept me prisoner. At last one night, while she lay sleeping, I escaped with her own sword and wand. (He shows a small wand whose head is set with a sapphire of great brilliance.)

KING. The wand! How bright the sapphire glows!

ST. GEORGE. Bright in sooth, in time of safety. If anything threatens me it clouds and grows lifeless and dim. (ALCYON takes the wand to look at it more closely.) Aided by this magic stick, and by my faith, I have had many adventures, overcoming Almedor, King of Morocco, and killing strange

beasts and wild boars that infest the Frankish plains. A hermit told me of this Golgol, whom I long have sought. He escaped me once. I hastened across the sea alone, coming in time to slay the beast!

KING. To him who should save her, I promised my daughter's hand and half my kingdom.

SIR BODELOC. (Flourishing a spear) I would have done it. You can see I would have done it!

SIR GEORGE. What I did, I did for love and honour not for gold. But I am sore athirst!

KING. (To SIR BODELOC) Fetch the hero some drink.

SIR BODELOC. Am I then a water carrier? (Goes off Left.)

SIR GEORGE. (to ALCYON) You have not told me your name, fair maid.

KING. Alcyon is she called and a better girl you'll not find in four kingdoms.

SIR BODELOC. (Returns with water carried in his helmet) Quench your thirst. I offer you this drink in friendliness.

ST. GEORGE. In friendliness, I take it. (He starts to drink.)

ALCYON. The wand! The sapphire pales.

ST. GEORGE. (His hand on his sword) What danger threatens now?

ALCYON. The drink!

KING. (Taking helmet) I mistrust yonder knight. 'Tis dragon's blood! He pours the drink upon the ground.)

ST. GEORGE. (Gazing sternly at SIR BODELOC, who turns away) His face tells its own story.

SIR BODELOC. Was I to let this stranger win the trophies due my valour?

KING. Your valour! (To ST. GEORGE) This man would have killed thee. Will you run him through with that same sword that slew the monster?

ST. GEORGE. My wand has saved my life. Need I shed his blood?

KING. Do you spare him? Then will I banish him forever from my kingdom. (To SIR BODELOC) Go! To the castle! Take your horse and sword, and make your way alone and out of my sight forever. (SIR BODELOC tries to appeal to ALCYON, but she turns away. He goes down the hill R.) He is gone.

ALCYON. (To ST. GEORGE) I thought I would not see the sun again, nor hear the red bird sing his morning song. To you I owe my life.

ST. GEORGE. It has ever been my fate to walk in pleasant ways, but now all seems to have led but to this moment only. My lady! (He kneels.)

ALCYON. (Raising him) My true lord! (They embrace.)

(Enter the NURSE, R., panting.)

NURSE. My pet, my love -- are you bewitched? Are you enchanted then? As the dragon taken your fair form? The castle is aroused, and mothers cry in fear!

KING. How now! Bewitched indeed! This is some wild tale Sir Bodeloc has spread. Alive is Alcyon and well. Her life saved by this good warrior.

NURSE. (Touching ALCYON, to make sure) Arms like my baby girl; hair, the same; two dimples. It is my Alcyon, for sure!

KING. Bewitched indeed! We had best hasten to the town with the true tale of Alcyon's deliverance.

NURSE. Where's the dragon? (She looks around suspiciously and shakes her head.)

ALCYON. The dragon's dead!

ST. GEORGE. Yonder in that grove he lies, still at last.

NURSE. (Going over to Left entrance, looking off, and stopping with a shiver) Drag him down to the castle! Let the people see the dead monster with their own eyes -- Hurry! Hurry! The people are half dead themselves with fright!

ST. GEORGE. In faith, I'll do it! (Exits Left.)

KING. (Watching him at the edge of the grove) Heave! Pull! What a fearsome beast! Lead on! Lead on! I come! (Exit KING Left.)

ST. GEORGE. (Heard in distance)

"Oh, here comes I, Saint George
A man of courage bold!"

NURSE. (Looking slyly at ALCYON, who stands wrapt in admiration for the young warrior) A fine figure of a young man! (She tugs at ALCYON'S sleeve and they go down the hill, R. -- ST. GEORGE'S song still audible.)

(As they disappear with GOLGOL'S massive form, the MOTHER DRAGON appears at the door of the cave. She is wearing a night-cap, and rubs her eyes sleepily.)

MOTHER DRAGON. Golgol! (She comes out of the cave and calls louder) Golgol! You needn't try to hide! I have heard your rampings and stampings. I tell you, your smoke has penetrated the deepest corner of the cave where my children lie sleeping! Even if you are a guest, I don't like it and it has got to stop.

ST. GEORGE. (Off. His song is heard very faintly)"Oh, here comes I, Saint George."

MOTHER DRAGON. (Crosses the stage and looks over the brow of the hill) Golgol! (The word is interrupted by a gasp of astonishment, as the truth dawns on her) Mehitabel! Your uncle is dead! Humans are dragging away his body. What disgrace -- what disaster!

MEHITABEL. (Enters from the cove, running to her mother) Mother!

MOTHER. (Pointing to the Left) Down there!

MEHITABEL. (Going to the edge of the table) How small the humans -- they can hardly drag Uncle Golgol's body down the hill. The singing one -- how slender he is -- how weak.

MOTHER. Yet such a cut as Golgol bears would have killed twenty dragons.

MEHITABEL. He must have had the help of his gods.

ALEXANDER. (Enters, unconcernedly stretching his limbs) What's this -- Uncle Golgol dead? Well, I thought he would come to no good end! Now we can settle down to a peaceful life once more.

MOTHER. Our peaceful days are ended. No more food will be brought to us. We shall have to fight for our very lives.

ZAR. (Enters) Never mind, I will protect you.

MEHITABEL. What shall we do?

MOTHER. We must leave this place at once.

MEHITABEL. Leave our cave -- our home!

MOTHER. Our home! That's just it. I have tried hard to make a home for you here. It hasn't been easy. But I pride myself I have brought you children up with nice manners as if you moved, as your father did, in the best society of the Mediterranean! And now we shall have to leave.

ZAR. I think it's rather jolly!

MOTHER. How can I be expected to raise a family properly if I have to

move every thousand years?

ZAR. I hear a noise. Watch me snort!

MOTHER. We must fly!

ZAR. Let's go to Ireland! Or Labrador! I do like traveling.

MEHITABEL. Shall we take the family relics?

(The MOTHER nods and MEHITABEL hurries into the cave, followed by ZAR. The MOTHER turns at the door of the cave and sees ALEXANDER sitting pensively on a rock.)

MOTHER. Alexander Augustus, are you thinking again? This is no time for thought. Don't you realize how awful this is -- to have to leave our home!

ALEXANDER. Mother, I'm not going.

MOTHER. Alexander! You know that no dragon can remain where a relative of his has been killed. You have to go!

ALEXANDER. But do I, really? After all, it's only a tradition.

MOTHER. No dragon ever has lived where --

ALEXANDER. Then I will be the first. Rather an idea that!

MOTHER. Men will find out your hiding places -- you will not be able to escape them!

ALEXANDER. If need be, I will go into the deepest recesses of the cave -- they cannot follow. My mind, dear Mother, is made up! (Enter ZAR and MEHITABEL, carrying a small bundle.)

MOTHER. Alexander is not going!

MEHITABEL. Not going! (She drops her bundle) Alexander Augustus. (WARN CURTAIN.)

ZAR. Not going! Not going traveling, fighting, adventuring. Not going! Why, that's as bad as not being a dragon at all!

MOTHER. (Pleading) We need you so-- and you won't have any food.

MEHITABEL. They won't be bringing any more sheep, I can tell you.

ALEXANDER. (Yawning) Well, if I can't eat I can always sleep, and you know as well as I do that dragons needn't eat as long as they sleep. I'll sleep -- I'll sleep for a hundred years! Then I have my poetry, too. I've never had enough time for it. I'll polish up all my sonnets.

MEHITABEL. But you'll have no one to read them to. (Whispers to her mother) If I know Alexander that will bring him 'round.

ALEXANDER. (Weakening) It would be nice to read you my poems!

MEHITABEL. (Aloud) Oh Alexander, do be sensible! Think of the fun we'll have, after the fighting is over and we've conquered a new home.

MOTHER. (With a deep sigh) Alas, if we ever do!

ALEXANDER. But no! I don't like fighting and I must be firm. After all, I have always said that I have resources within myself.

MOTHER. It's no use, I have to go. It's my duty. I must think of the other children.

ALEXANDER. (Comforting his mother) I know -- everybody must be what he truly is. You are the good conservative mother of a family. Quite right, too -- and a dear old mother you have been. But I'm different. I'm reluctant to travel. I'm reluctant to fight. I'm a kind of -- a sort of -- Reluctant Dragon.

ZAR. (Ramping) I'm going to ramp across Mesopotamia -- or maybe to Cathay! (Exit ZAR with one last ramp.)

MOTHER. Farewell, my son. (They embrace. Exit MOTHER slowly, L.

MEHITABEL. I'm going to miss you.

ALEXANDER. I know -- you listened to my rhymes even when they weren't quite! (They bid each other an affectionate goodbye. MEHITABEL goes out L. after the OTHERS. ALEXANDER waves to them until they are out of sight. Then he gravely settles down before the door of the cave. Gets up to arrange a rock a little more to his taste. Views it from all angles. Sits down. Gets up. Picks a flower) The first anemone! I wonder what rhymes with anemone! (He looks around) But after all, I needn't bother. I shall have plenty of time for all that! CURTAIN.

ACT TWO
SCENE I

Time: Autumn. Late afternoon. The present. SCENE: The Downs. The towers and walls of the distant town have crumbled, and only a few spires remain, rising like ghosts above the trim houses of a modern English village. But nothing has changed on the hillside, except that sheep are grazing in the distance and to the left a shepherd's hut, with smoke coming pleasantly out of the chimney. The dragon's cave is still to be seen on the Left, although the entrance is almost hidden by great overhanging bushes. AT RISE. MALCOLM, a young boy, enters from the Left. He walks slowly, not watching where he is going, feeling his way along the familiar chalky paths. He is occupied in reading a big book, and his gaze even when his eyes leave the page is turned inward upon the story. He has a snub nose and red hair and a gay voice -- it is only his eyes that tell you he is the fairy story and giant kind of a boy.

MALCOLM. "And Sir Launcelot put his shield afore him and put away one giant and with his sword he clave his head asunder!" Oh, wouldn't I just! But nothing happens nowadays -- at least not up here on the Downs -- at least not to me!

(Enter from the Right. REUBEN, MALCOLM'S father, carrying a load of faggots and a small axe. He is dressed in timeless garments of a shepherd, and looks not unlike the shepherd of 1300 years before. His face is good-natured, though a trifle rugged and worn.)

REUBEN. Reading, is he! Malcolm! He doesn't hear his own parent, so drowned is he in the book. Malcolm! I thought you were goin' to fetch in the sheep, it growing toward the night.

MALCOLM. (Looking up with a start) Fetch the sheep -- and so I am!

REUBEN. Then you must be fetchin' them hindside before -- you're walking away from the grazing ground -- if putting your feet forward so, a pace a minute, can be rightly termed walking.

MALCOLM. (Chagrined, looks around) Now however did I get so turned about? I'm sorry!

REUBEN. "Sorry" won't bring the sheep home for the night; but let be. Proud I am to have son can read big thick books and 'pear to like 'em, too.

MALCOLM. I truly didn't mean to read again, while tending sheep, but Mr. Partridge came by, and I happened to ask him what was the book he was carrying.

REUBEN. Mr. Partridge came by. Why for, do you suppose?

MALCOLM. On his way to town he came; and he said it was a very true book of fairy tales he was reading, but he had to go to town.

REUBEN. Mayhap he's getting ready to go back to the circus; there's autumn in the air for certain.

MALCOLM. He didn't mention the circus, but the book, he said, wanted reading; and since he was going to fetch his daughter from the railways, maybe, he said, I would do him the favor to read his book while he was gone. Do you suppose books do like to be read?

REUBEN. (Shaking his head) Autumn and the circus comes together.

MALCOLM. It's got a King Arthur story and a fine piece about dragons.

REUBEN. Dragons! Well, I wonder that a grown-up man like Mr. Partridge, old enough to be a grandfather he is, should be having a book about such heathen things as dragons! But being a circus man makes him different, anyways. Bein't he goin' to the circus soon? It's autumn in the air, and with the autumn, circus comes.

MALCOLM. 'Twas his daughter he went to fetch.

REUBEN. A girl -- has he? You can't hardly picture a funny man in a circus with a girl-child like other folk. Funny he were, too, that time the circus came to Maidenbridge.

MALCOLM. Do you mind how he turned the somersaults right under the lion's nose?

REUBEN. And went through the hoop head-foremost-afore the bareback lady ever could! To think one as can do them things should content himself summerin' on the Downs! I should think he'd rather be followin' after wild beasts or ridin' elephants and such in his free time.

(Some one is heard whistling a tune, and presently MR. PARTRIDGE and his daughter, ELAINE, appear R., walking happily up the lane, past the shepherd's house over the hill. MR. PARTRIDGE is the sort of man children want to play with and women want to tidy up. His hair is covered with a jolly kind of cap; his long, lean legs clothed in heavy trousers of a greenish rough material; his coat stands open; his pockets bulging with pleasant-looking parcels. He is carrying a straw portmanteau and a red parasol in one hand, while ELAINE, a nice-looking young girl, with hair in plaits, clings affectionately to his other arm.)

MR. PARTRIDGE. Good evening to you both. (To MALCOLM) Did you keep that book from being lonely, lad?

MALCOLM. (Quickly offering the book) Thank you kindly for the loan of it.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Keep it -- keep it till you've read it through. It's little use I'll have for books now my daughter's come.

MALCOLM. I see you fetched her, sir.

MR. PARTRIDGE. She almost fetched herself. I met her trudging up the hill as though she'd always lived upon the Downs. 'Tis Malcolm the lad I told you of, who has the nice, friendly way with books, reading great thick volumes of natural history and all the fairy tales I've got, in a sandwichy sort of way that strikes me as pretty sensible. (ELAINE laughs, then makes a formal schoolgirl curtsy. MALCOLM greets her more shyly.)

ELAINE. Anybody that likes to read your books strikes you as sensible, Pa!

MR. PARTRIDGE. And this is Malcolm's father, that owns the pretty house you lately wished for, passing by.

REUBEN. So you brought the young lady? A welcome to you, sure. And are you to carry her to the circus, too? I think me it will soon be calling you. I have seen frost today.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Sadly) Many a frost will you see at dawn before the circus calls for me again.

ELAINE. Now, Pa.

REUBEN. It wouldn't be the circus without you, Sir.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Filling his pipe with hands that tremble) The circus doesn't want old men.

ELAINE. Don't you mind, Pa.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Cast off like an old snake's skin -- that's what I am.

REUBEN. A poor kind of a circus it will be without you, Mr. Partridge. Many's the time I have laughed till my bones ached seein' you ride the lion's tail -- and them somersaults, -- oh, my!

MR. PARTRIDGE. 'Tis noise they want now -- clamour and the blare of trumpets. No less than ten funny men riding in a motor car! One old clown doubling when the need falls as the knight in armour, or feeding of the wild beasts now and then. That's not what is wanted on the circus today.

MALCOLM. But, Mr. Partridge, if you don't go back to the circus, what will you do now?

ELAINE. I'm going to take care of him -- you'll see.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (To REUBEN) Do you think I'll make a good Downs man?

REUBEN. Ah, that, Mr. Partridge! You'd have to be born a Downs man and your father and grandfather before you. Right here we've been and tended sheep since the Druids practiced their dark ways. 'Tis said, when we first came, a king lived in yonder ruin where only the rooks nest now. I don't know the rights on it, but only I know it takes many a year to make a Downs man.

MALCOLM. But you could try, Mr. Partridge; you could try!

REUBEN. That you could, sir. I'll tell you what -- do you and the young lady come sup with us tonight, neighbor fashion!

ELAINE. Oh, Father, could we?

MR. PARTRIDGE. But your wife --

REUBEN. Maria would consider it an honour, sir. I'll go acquaint her with the news of company, and go, too, to fetch the sheep.

MALCOLM (Starting up) I'll go!

REUBEN. Nay, do you bide here.

MR. PARTRIDGE. I'm coming with you. I want a pipe, and a walk'll do me good. (Exit REUBEN and MR. PARTRIDGE, R. ELAINE walks around, apparently paying no attention to MALCOLM.)

MALCOLM. (Drawn back to his book, turning the pages idly, then looking up at ELAINE) You know, there's something missing in circuses.

ELAINE. Not in my father's circus!

MALCOLM. Something that ought to be in circuses. (Holds the book up for ELAINE to see the picture at which it is opened.)

ELAINE. Oh! Dragons! Wouldn't it be wonderful.

MALCOLM. Better than elephants!

ELAINE. Better than giraffes!

MALCOLM. Better than hippopotamuses or Arab steeds, with ladies in spangles! (Breaking off suddenly) What's your name?

ELAINE. Elaine.

MALCOLM. That's funny!

ELAINE. Why is my name funny? It's a perfectly good name.

MALCOLM. Oh, I didn't mean it wasn't -- only, I was just goin' to say, "Let's play 'Launcelot and Elaine.'" You know, out of the book -- here, where it says, "Anon, Sir Launcelot!"

ELAINE. (Nodding eagerly, scrambles on a rock) This is my castle! (Continuing in a languid voice) Enter, Sir Launcelot! Enter my beautiful castle and rest you from battle.

MALCOLM. (In a stage whisper) Say "Anon." Say "Rest you, anon" -- it sounds more -- more --

ELAINE. All right. Rest you anon from weary battle, Sir Knight.

MALCOLM. That's a bit of all right. (Changing his voice) Alas, fair maid, fain would I do thy bidding, but Sir Launcelot cannot rest. King

Arthur calls him to the Round Table to do some boons and things. Here, keep you this shield the while! (He gives ELAINE an imaginary shield. ELAINE is about to answer, when she suddenly begins looking around. She jumps from her rock) What's the matter?

ELAINE. (In her natural voice) What could we have for a boat?

MALCOLM. Oh, just pretend.

ELAINE. I have to have a boat. Look, here is the picture of the Lily Maid floating down the dark river. You can see for yourself, I have to have a boat.

MALCOLM. (Bored) This isn't very exciting.

ELAINE. You see, I have to have a boat!

MALCOLM. Let's play dragons. Let's play Saint George and the Dragon! You can be Alcyon, the fair princess Saint George saved.

ELAINE. How do I get saved?

MALCOLM. I'll tie you to this rock -- but what'll I tie you with?

ELAINE. Here, take my sash. (He fastens her to the rock.)

MALCOLM. You have to weep and wail 'cause the dragon's going to eat you. It says so here. Then I come over the hill. (He starts out, Right.)

ELAINE. Alas! Alas! (She laments loudly.)

MALCOLM. (Stops short) Wait a minute. I have to have a sword. (He breaks a branch and begins to whittle a sword) That cave is the very thing for dragons.

ELAINE. You must say, "Why do you weep, fair maiden?"

MALCOLM. Oh, pretend I know that. Let's get to the fighting. I march up like this and call that old dragon. (The sword is finished.)

ELAINE. Sing!

MALCOLM. "Oh, here comes I, Saint George,
A Man of courage bold."

(He strikes on the stone at the entrance of the cave and flourishes his newly whittled sword. In a loud voice.) Dragon, come forth!

(Enter ALEXANDER AUGUSTUS. As he comes to the door of the cave, he is seen not to have changed much in all these years. A bit more sedate, perhaps, but ALEXANDER AUGUSTUS always was a quiet, dignified beast. He puts his head out of the cave, then comes slowly out.)

ALEXANDER. Hold, Sir Knight! Let us parley ere we fight! (Sees MALCOLM) Bless me, it isn't a knight at all! I think I know what it is -- it's a boy! Pesky creatures they often are, too. That squire of King Edward's I won't forget soon. (To MALCOLM, who stands speechless) Now don't you throw stones or squirt water or anything!

ELAINE. (Recovering her voice) Malcolm come away. We'll be killed -- it's a real dragon!

ALEXANDER. Of course I'm a real dragon. Didn't you call me? If you don't want me I can easily retire! (He starts to go back into the cave.)

MALCOLM. Oh, don't retire!

ALEXANDER. No one can say I'm in the habit of coming where I'm not welcome.

ELAINE. Oh, stay. Please stay.

ALEXANDER. (Pleased) Well, if you insist. (He steps out and looks around; ramps a bit to stretch his limbs. The two CHILDREN clutch each other in mingled terror and delight) The fact is, I'm happy as the day is long -- never without an occupation, dear childred, never without an occupation; and yet, between ourselves, it has been a trifle dull at time.

ELAINE. (Tugging at her belt) Untie me, Malcolm! (MALCOLM starts to obey, but ALEXANDER, with a gallant gesture, loosens ELAINE'S ribbon with one thunderous bite.)

ALEXANDER. Allow me. (The CHILDREN clutch each other in fright.) Where do you live?

MALCOLM. (Stoutly) I live here. Where did you come from?

ALEXANDER. I suppose I might say I live here, too -- at least it's been a couple of thousand years since I've been anywhere else! By the way, what century is this?

ELAINE. (With a laugh) What century? I've heard people ask what day -- but not to even know the century.

ALEXANDER. (Starts to withdraw into his cave, speaking in a hurt tone) A day seems long to you because you have so little to put against it. But I see I'm not understood.

MALCOLM. Don't go!

ELAINE. Please forgive me.

MALCOLM. It's hard for her to understand about the way dragons feel. She's so surprised to see you here. I'm not!

ALEXANDER. Well, well, you're not surprised?

MALCOLM. I always said this was the very cave for a dragon. Well, when it has a dragon, naturally I'm not surprised. Can you ramp and stamp and spit fire? Have you had tremendous adventures fighting knights?

ALEXANDER. (Setting down on his rock once more) The truth is, though you'd never guess it, I'm a confoundedly lazy begger. That's really how I come to be here at all. You see, all the others were so active and earnest -- always rampaging, skirmishing, scouring the sands and pacing the margin of the sea and chasing knights and ramping and stamping around till first thing you know they found themselves dead ones. Now, I've always been reluctant to fight.

MALCOLM. (Earnestly) But not to fight! Why, it's hardly to be a dragon at all!

ALEXANDER. (Jumping up in chagrin) That's just what my younger brother Zar said after Saint George had killed that rascally Golgol -- served him right, too!

ELAINE. Did Saint George really kill a dragon -- right here?

ALEXANDER. Have you heard of him?

MALCOLM. Haven't we just!

ALEXANDER. Alas, those were the good old days when there were sheep for breakfast every day. (Sighs and looks wistfully at the CHILDREN, but they are too excited to take any delicate hints about food. To himself) They didn't even listen -- about the food. I'll try again! (Louder) King Arthur was a good feaster, too. Many's the Round Table morsel have I got, after making friends with the knights who came to exterminate me!

MALCOLM. (In awe) Did you ever see Sir Launcelot?

ALEXANDER. See him? I almost ate him -- before we were friends, you know. Sir Galahad, too -- but he was a bit on the earnest side. I've heard said he chased my young brother clean across England. But I doubt that. Zar was a great fighter ever.

(ELAINE and MALCOLM whisper together in great excitement, hardly noticing ALEXANDER'S words. ALEXANDER goes over and taps MALCOLM on the arm. The CHILDREN jump.)

ALEXANDER. (Reproachfully) Now I'll name you some more good feasters. King Edward, he came up here with his Knights of the Garter. They used to have good feastings, too -- juicy young lambs and what not.

ELAINE. (Earnestly) But you said you were never without an occupation; and if you don't fight, what do you do -- if it isn't being

impolite to ask?

ALEXANDER. (The only subject that will make him forget food) The fact is -- the truth of the matter is -- I write poetry!

ELAINE. Live and learn! None of the books ever told me that dragons wrote poetry!

MALCOLM. (Thoughtfully) I wondered if poetry belonged only to humans.

ALEXANDER. Does the sky -- the winds -- the sea? The pale anemone?

MALCOLM. You made a rhyme right there.

ALEXANDER. Bless my scales! So I did. (Looking keenly at MALCOLM) Do you -- write poetry, too?

MALCOLM. (Nodding his head). Sometimes.

ALEXANDER. When you read it -- do people listen as you would like them to?

MALCOLM. Mother tries to, but she doesn't quite --

ALEXANDER. Exactly! (WARN CURTAIN)

MALCOLM. Mother's very kind and all that, but somehow she doesn't seem to --

ALEXANDER. Exactly! I had a sister who listened -- even to sonnets! But mostly they don't.

ELAINE. Won't you recite some now?

ALEXANDER. I'm afraid you'd be bored.

MALCOLM and ELAINE. (Together -- politely) Oh, no indeed!

ALEXANDER. (Arranging himself elaborately so that his shining scales show to best advantage. Clearing his throat) Let me think. (In the rapt voice of a poet reading his own)

"On the hill the silly sheep --"
No, that's not the way it begins.

"I wonder why the humans keep
On the hill, the silly sheep."
(Dropping his poetical manner) I shouldn't have mentioned sheep -- it makes me too hungry! I don't suppose you two could dine with me, and bring the dinner?

ELAINE. He's hungry! The poor old dragon's hungry!

ALEXANDER. (With relief that at last they understand) I should say I am. I haven't had anything for several hundred years!

MALCOLM. Let's fetch him something.

ALEXANDER. (Eagerly) A couple of sheep or a fat bullock, perhaps.

MALCOLM. Well, hardly that; but there's apt to be cold mutton in the cupboard and a bit of pudding.

ALEXANDER. (Jumping up) Well, let's get started right away! (He takes MALCOLM by the hand.)

MALCOLM. Oh, no, Mother wouldn't understand, I'm sure! You stay here; we'll get something for you! (They start off R. toward the cottage.)

ALEXANDER. Cold mutton and suet pudding! It's not much, but it's something! (He ramps ever so slightly to express pleasant anticipation.)
CURTAIN.

ACT TWO
SCENE II

SCENE: The kitchen of the shepherd's home. Pleasant, homely and old-fashioned. A large fireplace R., with briquettes of peat burning and a

kettle hanging from the crane. Old tables and chairs. A wide, high-lead window L.C. rear, giving a glimpse of the Downs. A door to the R., leading to the other room of the house. Another, R.C., rear, opening to the out-doors. Bench down R.; chair above fireplace; chair L. of R.C. door; cupboard in front of window; chair L. of window; Welsh dresser down L.; table C. with chair L. of it. TIME: A few minutes later. The twilight deepens to dark during the scene. AT RISE. MALCOLM'S mother, MARIA, is discovered, vigourously beating up a pudding in a big brown bowl. She is a merry looking, motherly woman, in dark skirt and blouse, her sleeves rolled to the elbow. Her apron is spotless white and spreads expansively over a generous lap. As she beats she sings an old tune.

MARIA. ("My love is Like a Red, Red Rose," or any sentimental British ballad could be substituted for this song of William Blake's)

"How sweet I roamed from field to field
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide."

If company's coming, it will be best I put another egg in the pudding. (She gets up and, going to the cupboard, brings out another egg. As she turns her back to the window, MALCOLM'S head is seen, as he peers cautiously in. Turning to ELAINE, who is barely visible through the tall window, he puts his finger to his lips. The CHILDREN disappear from the window before MARIA returns. She sits down and begins to beat and sing again.)

"He showed me lilies for my hair
And blushing roses for my brow,
And led me through his gardens fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grow."

If company is coming, it will be best I put my other apron on! (She jumps up and goes L. into the inner room.)

(The CHILDREN enter quickly and silently from the R.C. door. MALCOLM picks up a small basket near the door and hurries to the cupboard and begins filling the basket.)

ELAINE. Aren't you going to ask?

MALCOLM. I'd rather not. Grown-ups would never understand about a dragon -- you know that.

ELAINE. They'd likely be scared!

MALCOLM (Stuffing food into the basket) Mother would call him an enemy of the human race. That good old dragon!

ELAINE. I know! Grown-ups want everything like it always was.

MALCOLM. And it mostly isn't. Do you suppose dr -- you know -- would like baked apples?

MARIA. (Enters. She stops at the doorway) Are you hungry, darling? The cooky jar's on the window sill. (She sees the large basket of food) Whatever are you children doing?

MALCOLM. This is Elaine, Ma -- Mr. Partridge's Elaine. (He puts the basket behind him and tries to slip out.)

ELAINE. (With a curtsy) Pleased to meet you, Ma'am.

MARIA. (Not to be put off) Malcolm what mischief are you up to with that food? 'Twill be supper time directly; stop a while.

MALCOLM. Oh, it's not for us!

MARIA. Whatever does the boy mean?

MALCOLM. Ma, it's something awfully 'portant. It's -- It's a beggar, a hungry beggar.

ELAINE. (With relief) Yes'm, a beggar.

MARIA. A hungry man is it? Why, bring him in!

MALCOLM. It's not exactly -- it's a mysterious beggar.

ELAINE. Oh, Ma'am we couldn't bring him in!

MARIA. (Looking from one to the other) Is it some play you're playing? But you've got half the supper, child!

MALCOLM. I'm not very hungry. Are you, Elaine?

MARIA. Not hungry? It would be the first time!

MALCOLM. I won't be but a minute, Ma. You explain, Elaine.
(MALCOLM runs out.)

MARIA. These menfolk!

ELAINE. They are a trial, aren't they, Ma'am? My father, now. I never know what he's up to next.

MARIA. I suppose not, being a circus man. It is true he's not to go back?

ELAINE. Do you think he'll mind very much -- when he gets accustomed-like? I mean to take care of him fine. My aunt, where I've been living, taught me how. Will I set the table for you, Ma'am?

MARIA. (Nods and they begin laying the cloth and setting the table as they talk. The pudding is put on the fire, too. ELAINE looks anxiously out of the window, now and then) Men are funny creatures, as you'll find. I doubt not he'll sorely miss the music of the laughing crowds.

ELAINE. And the circus smells!

MARIA. And the crack of the horses' hoofs in his ears!

ELAINE. But I'll make it up to him. I'll -- I'll have pudding for him every day. (FOOTSTEPS are heard.) That will be Malcolm! (The R.C. door opens a crack and MR. PARTRIDGE sticks his head in.) Pa!

MR. PARTRIDGE. Who's to have pudding every day?

ELAINE. (Running up to him, smoothing his hair, straightening his tie, and tidying him up affectionately) Look at you, your hair, your tie. We are to have pudding every day, then you won't mind about the circus, will you?

MR. PARTRIDGE. Never a thought I'll give the circus when you're with me.

MARIA. 'Tis a sweet comfort she'll be to you.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Am I come too early?

MARIA. Indeed no, Mr. Partridge.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Where's Reuben. I thought to meet him along the path.

MARIA. He'll not be long away.

ELAINE. There's Malcolm. (Enter MALCOLM, with the empty basket. He nods to ELAINE, who claps her hands for joy.)

MR. PARTRIDGE. What are these young ones up to?

MARIA. Such goings on, about a beggar that's not a beggar.

MALCOLM. Now, Ma!

MR. PARTRIDGE. Oh, it'll be some innocent mischief, I feel sure.

MARIA. I wonder where's your father, Malcolm? Did you see him on the Downs? (She lights lamp.)

MALCOLM. I thought him home, long before now.

MARIA. (Puts the pudding on the stove in a great steaming kettle) It's growing dark.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Looking out of the window) Well, there's no safer place a man can be than upon the Downs. (MALCOLM and ELAINE whisper in the corner.)

MARIA. A brave man, my Reuben, and not afraid of the dark.

MALCOLM I hear his step now!

MARIA. (Anxiously) 'Tis most times his whistle we hear first! A gay fine whistle my Reuben has! (Enter REUBEN, R.C., thoroughly agitated. He sets his stick awkwardly against the wall, his fingers so unsteady that it falls with a clatter. He sinks, trembling, into a chair.) Reuben! Have you forgot the company?

REUBEN. Shut fast the door!

MARIA. Whatever for? You're tremblin', Reuben. Oh, whatever has befell?

MR. PARTRIDGE. Have the sheep come to harm?

REUBEN. Not the sheep!

MARIA. We're all here! Malcolm yonder safe and sound!

REUBEN. It's out there! It's them Downs! Never no more will I go on them Downs!

MR. PARTRIDGE. But all the years of your life have been passed on the Downs. Your Downs to you are like the circus is to me.

MARIA. More, Mr. Partridge. More -- it's breath of life to Reuben, the Downs!

REUBEN. Never no more will I step on that farthest hill! Was it ever so.

MARIA. Now don't take on. Tell us about it first. Whatever it was frightened you we ought to be able to get to the bottom of it.

REUBEN. You know that cave up there? I never liked it and the sheep never neither -- and when sheep act that-a-way there's generally a reason.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Oh, if it's just sheep acting queerly!

REUBEN. Sheep? 'Twain't sheep I'm talking of. I'm just sayin' why I was passin' wide of the cave, drivin' the flock home, when I heard a noise. It weren't a human noise neither! I was frightened, but I couldn't keep away!

MARIA. What kind of a noise?

REUBEN. Like a snore it were -- but not a honest human snore. So I goes back, leavin' the sheep huddled-like on the path. Then, oh Lord! I saw him! Plain as I see you.

MR. PARTRIDGE. But whom?

REUBEN. As big as four cathorses and all covered with shiny scales!

MALCOLM (Calmly, a little bored) It's all right, Pa. Don't be worried -- it's only a dragon.

REUBEN. Only a dragon! Only! Scales, you know, and claws he had, and a flicker of fire from his nostrils as he slept.

MARIA. The heathen beast!

MR. PARTRIDGE. This is amazing -- incredible.

ELAINE. We talked to him. (MR. PARTRIDGE holds his daughter as if to protect her from danger.)

MALCOLM. (Looking from one to the other) Don't worry. It's quite all right.

REUBEN. You and your dragons! Only a dragon indeed!

MALCOLM. Look here, Pa. You know about sheep and weather and things -- but I know about dragons.

MR. PARTRIDGE. But in this day and time! It's all very well in books.

77# MALCOLM. I always said it was the very cave for a dragon! (A loud knock on the door R.C. REUBEN starts trembling all over again.)

MARIA. Hold fast the door! (MR. PARTRIDGE stands against the door. MALCOLM looks out of the window.)

MALCOLM. It's the Mayor!

MARIA. (Tidying up her hair and straightening her apron) The Mayor!

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Still holding the door) Shall I?

Cue REUBEN. Aye, open it a crack.

(Enter the MAYOR, a plump, red-nosed, important looking gentleman. He pants with excitement as he steps on the threshold, looking at the faces before him.)

2 REUBEN. It is the Mayor. Come in, come in, and shut the door.

MR. PARTRIDGE. I'll bolt it, too.

MAYOR. You've seen?

REUBEN. That I have. This close to the beast I were.

MAYOR. The town's in a hubbub. People climbing on roofs to see the sight or hiding in cellars in fear. Silhouetted clear against the sky he were at sundown, breathing fire!

REUBEN. (Forgetting his own fear) Scales he has, deep blue at the top of him, shading off to a tender sort of green below.

MAYOR. (Sitting down in the best chair, legs wide apart, tapping on the table importantly) What's to be done?

MR. PARTRIDGE. What, indeed?

MAYOR. He must be exterminated!

REUBEN. He was sleepin' peaceful enough, I must say.

MAYOR. Don't let looks deceive you. This very town in the old times had such a record of dragon killings would turn your hair white! Men and women devoured and children swallowed whole before their mother's eyes.

REUBEN. (Shaking his head) And sheep killed, too, most likely.

MAYOR. Dragons are enemies of the 'uman race and no mistake. He must be done away with. But how to do it?

MR. PARTRIDGE. How about reporting the matter to the authorities?

MAYOR. I am the authorities.

MARIA. (Quietly) I tell you what I think. I think it's a bit of good fortune we've got Mr. Partridge here.

MAYOR. Mr. Partridge! Why, he bein't even a Downs man, he bein't.

2 REUBEN. You don't understand, Maria. This be man's talk. When dangerous beasts be about, 'tis time the women be silent.

MARIA. Well, then, you Downs men, what will you do? (The MAYOR and REUBEN look at one another in perplexity.)

MAYOR. Well, -- er?

REUBEN. Blow me, I don't know. What?

MAYOR. That's just it. What?

MARIA. If I weren't a woman to be silent, I might remind you that Mr. Partridge here is used to wild beasts. If I were one to be talking, I might recall to you as how Mr. Partridge paraded right down the high street in the circus -- right down the high street dressed in armour of Saint George! I might tell you as how he's the fittest man in the country to fight

2
dragons, and all -- but, bein' a woman, I'll keep my silence!

MR. PARTRIDGE. I've fought many a beast and trained many a beast and tamed many a beast, but dragons! Never to this day. It's incredible, that's what it is!

MAYOR. (Looking MR. PARTRIDGE over) Saint George! There's something in it!

REUBEN. Sensible my Maria is -- even if she is a woman!

MAYOR. (Approaching MR. PARTRIDGE in an official manner) Mr. Partridge, sir, if you'll forgive me for what I said about your bein' a foreigner, sir, and not a Downs man.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Filling his pipe) Oh, that. Never mind that.

MAYOR. We would request you, sir, as fellow citizens and neighbors, in your capacity of Saint George, sir, to take the proper measures against our common enemy the dragon!

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Pleased) Do you think I could manage it?

REUBEN. Not a better choice in five counties! Think of the prestige, sir! You'll be famouser than the whole circus!

7
ELAINE. (Running up to her FATHER) But, Father.

REUBEN. Think of the girl, sir. You couldn't have her playing free on the Downs with a dragon about.

MR. PARTRIDGE. I'll do it!

MALCOLM. (Thoroughly alarmed) But he's a good dragon. I tell you!

MARIA. Be silent! Children should be seen and not heard in times like these.

MAYOR. Mr. Partridge can exterminate the beast first thing in the morning. We'll make a holiday of it -- with speeches after, and a banquet. We'll deck the town with banners. Maidenbridge will be noted, account of you, sir!

2
MR. PARTRIDGE. (Modestly) Well, it's really due to the dragon. I hope I can manage it.

REUBEN. To be sure, sir, to be sure. The way you turned them somersaults, sir, right before the lion's nose. You can easy kill a dragon, Mr. Partridge.

MAYOR. Come back to the tavern with me. Let us calm the people's fears.

MARIA. That's right. Make a proper holiday of it.

MAYOR. I'll be glad to make a speech. It's only right I should, after Mr. Partridge has killed the dragon.

MR. PARTRIDGE. My armour may be rusty, but I'll polish it tonight.

MARIA. (Bustling them off) Out you go.

7
ELAINE. But, Father!

MR. PARTRIDGE. (At the door) Don't worry, child. I'll come back for you in a wee bit. Early to bed I must go, to be ready for the dragon in the morning. Nothing like a good night's sleep for fighting dragons!

MALCOLM. But, Mr. Partridge.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Say no more, lad -- 'tis my duty!

REUBEN. (Taking MR. PARTRIDGE'S arm) You should have heard the beast roar.

17
MAYOR. (Taking MR. PARTRIDGE'S other arm) 'Tis only right I make a speech. (The THREE MEN go out. MALCOLM and ELAINE look at each other disconsolately. MARIA cheerfully puts the room to rights. She approaches the

table.)

MARIA. I declare, you've neither of you had your supper. Come, you must eat. (MALCOLM and ELAINE dutifully draw up to the table.) There's a nice bit of cheese. (WARN CURTAIN.)

ELAINE. I don't think I could eat any cheese.

MARIA. Nonsense. Children should eat what's put before them. And here's the pudding. (MARIA serves the pudding but neither MALCOLM nor ELAINE can eat a mouthful. MARIA bustles around, not noticing the despair of the children.)

MALCOLM. They don't understand -- dragons are sensitive creatures.

ELAINE. He's got terrible long claws.

MALCOLM. Why couldn't they let him alone? He wasn't harming a soul.

ELAINE. And Father was just goin' to settle down peaceful-like. I wanted him to!

MALCOLM. I'm sure his poetry is quite good.

ELAINE. His claws are so long and his mouth is so big.

MARIA. (Cheerfully) Well, I guess I'll just change my best apron. (She goes into the other room.)

ELAINE. (Beginning to cry) Suppose your old dragon hurts my father?

MALCOLM. Suppose your father hurts my dragon? We've got to take steps.

ELAINE. Take steps!

MALCOLM. Well, we've got to do something. I think we'd better consult the dragon.

ELAINE. Tonight? It's awful dark. Your mother'd never let you.

MALCOLM. Early in the morning, then. You come up your path, and I'll come up mine. Maybe the dragon can think of something.

ELAINE. Suppose I can't get away?

MALCOLM. You'll have to. (MARIA returns; sits down with her knitting. MALCOLM, whispering to ELAINE) By the big rock! Early! We've got to do something!

MARIA. That's right. Have a good time together, dearies, and tomorrow we'll have a real holiday -- after Mr. Partridge disposes of that there dragon.

ELAINE. But suppose!

MALCOLM. (Looking out the door) I always said that was the very cave for a dragon. CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

SCENE: Before the dragon's cave. TIME: The next morning. AT RISE: ELAINE is seen approaching from the Left. She enters timidly and looks around fearfully for MALCOLM.

ELAINE. It is so quiet in the morning. I wish Malcolm would come on. He said early.

MALCOLM. (Enters, running, from the Right) There you are! Were you scared coming along?

ELAINE. Not very.

MALCOLM. You father -- if he still going to do it?

ELAINE. He's got his armour all laid out on the chair. And last night,

when I went to bed, he was sharpening his sword. Oh, it's awful!

MALCOLM. Well, there's nothing else to do. We'll have to consult the dragon! (MALCOLM starts to knock.)

ELAINE. Do you suppose he'll mind --being waked?

MALCOLM. Well, he'll like it better than being killed, I bet! (He strikes the stone) Wake up, Dragon, wake up! (To ELAINE) You know, if there has to be a fight, I think it's rather exciting!

ALEXANDER. (Enters) There, there, do be more quiet.

MALCOLM. You won't be quiet, either, when you've heard my news!

ALEXANDER. If you must come calling so very early in the morning, you might at least call me by my proper name, which, I forgot to say, is Alexander Augustus.

MALCOLM. He's coming! He's coming to fight you. It's Saint George coming -- to see if he can't exterminate you! The whole village is to have a holiday and there's flags and a banquet! And we thought we ought to tell you so you'd do something!

ALEXANDER. Do something? That's just what I won't. Why should I? I haven't harmed any one -- haven't an enemy in the world. Why should any one want to exterminate me?

ELAINE. It isn't personal, you know. It's just that dragons are enemies of the human race.

ALEXANDER. Well, if it isn't personal, then I don't need to do anything about it at all.

MALCOLM. Oh, dear! I wish you would understand. This Saint George is coming after you with a sword. He's going to cut your head off.

ALEXANDER. Well, I just won't see him, that's all. You must tell him to go away at once, please.

MALCOLM. Now, Dragon.

ALEXANDER. You may call me Alexander.

MALCOLM. Alexander, I told him all about you -- about the sonnets and everything. It wasn't any use!

ELAINE. We never did hear the end of your poem, Alexander.

MALCOLM. Well, there's no time for poetry now. There's going to be a fight!

ALEXANDER. My dear boy, understand, once for all, that I won't fight. I've never fought in my life and I won't begin now. Fighters come to no good end. Golgol, Zar, Fafner, fighters all -- and where are they today? No, indeed. When danger threatens, I go deep into my cave and there I stay. I'm a Reluctant Dragon and a Reluctant Dragon I remain.

MALCOLM. But you said yourself it was dull -- and think what a beautiful place for combat -- these rolling Downs and the sun shining on your bright scales. What a subject for a poem!

ALEXANDER. That's a viewpoint I hadn't considered. (He swings his tail in a great circle. The CHILDREN draw together in fear.) Not bad ramping for a fellow that's had no practice, eh? I tell you what! Bring on your Saint George and I'll finish him off quickly and eat him for breakfast!

MALCOLM. You see, it's really the circus man, Mr. Partridge -- her father -- acting like Saint George. So you can't eat him up!

ALEXANDER. At least I'd get some use out of him. And he seems quite ready to kill me?

ELAINE. It's just because you are an enemy of the human race. It isn't personal.

ALEXANDER. I seems personal enough to me!

ELAINE: (Mournfully) I thought you would do something.

ALEXANDER. Well, this certainly is annoying. What do you want me to do?

MALCOLM. We thought you'd think of something.

ALEXANDER. Exactly. But when I do, you don't like it.

ELAINE. Oh, goodness me.

MALCOLM. (To ELAINE) You couldn't persuade your father to give up the whole affair?

ELAINE. (Shaking her head) His armour is all laid out over the chair.

MALCOLM. (Speaking with authority) Well, then, you go fetch Mr. Partridge here right away.

ELAINE. Malcolm, you have thought of something!

MALCOLM. I don't know. (ELAINE runs off L. happily.)

ALEXANDER. (Settling down comfortably) I knew you could arrange matters.

MALCOLM. It might not work at all. It's just a sort of a kind of a plan. (Going up to the DRAGON and looking him over) Is there anywhere on your body that doesn't hurt?

ALEXANDER. Anywhere that doesn't hurt? I'm quite well, thank you -- never been better -- nothing hurts!

MALCOLM. I mean, when you're speared, you know.

ALEXANDER. (Starting into his cave) I told you I wouldn't fight.

MALCOLM. Don't begin all over again. Just tell me that one thing. Have you a spot on your body that wouldn't hurt if it was speared? You must have. My goodness, you're as big as a haystack! (MALCOLM stands on tiptoe and feels around the DRAGON.)

ALEXANDER. Stop! You're tickling me!

MALCOLM (Feeling under ALEXANDER'S throat) But it doesn't hurt -- right there -- does it?

ALEXANDER. No.

MALCOLM. Remember that! Here comes Mr. Partridge. Now, Alexander, do act nicely -- this is a serious matter.

ALEXANDER. Serious? It's awful!

(Enter ELAINE, L., pushing an unwilling MR. PARTRIDGE along. He has his coat off, and is carrying a box of silver polish and a rag. MALCOLM draws MR. PARTRIDGE aside and whispers earnestly to him.)

ELAINE. (To ALEXANDER) My father was polishing his armour. You ought to see it! And his sword. It shines like the sun!

ALEXANDER. (Speculatively) He looks rather tough!

ELAINE. Alexander, he's my own darling papa. Don't you dare!

ALEXANDER. Exactly. I only said he looked rather tough!

MALCOLM. (Bringing MR. PARTRIDGE over) Come, we've got to get down to business. Alexander Augustus, meet Mr. Partridge!

ALEXANDER. Pleased to make your acquaintance, sir. Any friend of the children is always welcome, sir. Beautiful day, is it not?

MR. PARTRIDGE. beautiful, indeed -- splendid for the fight!

ALEXANDER. (Starts toward the cave with determined steps) Excuse me. I see you don't understand.

MALCOLM. Stop, Alexander! We must get down to business. There's got

to be some sort of fight! The Mayor has declared a holiday -- there's balloons and toffee and banners in the street!

MR. PARTRIDGE. And a banquet -- and speeches.

MALCOLM. (To ALEXANDER) You don't want to go way down that old hole again -- with no one to talk to.

ALEXANDER. (Walking up and down) A fight would make a beautiful picture -- quite a thing for my memoirs! You in your polished armour!

MALCOLM. You in your scales! Tell him, Mr. Partridge.

MR. PARTRIDGE. It's Malcolm's idea. I'm to spear you somewhere. You have to be vanquished, you know. But I needn't hurt you. There's nothing in the books about that.

ALEXANDER. (Thoughtfully. Looking from one to the other.) It might be arranged.

MR. PARTRIDGE. There's such a lot of you -- there must be a few spare places somewhere!

MALCOLM. Remember, Alexander.

ALEXANDER. (Pointing to his throat) There are a few folds of loose skin here. But are you sure you can spear the right place?

MR. PARTRIDGE. You leave that to me!

ALEXANDER. Exactly! It's because I've got to leave it to you that I'm asking.

MR. PARTRIDGE. I wouldn't for the world.

ALEXANDER. No doubt you would be very sorry if you made a mistake and cut off my head, but you wouldn't be half as sorry as I! But I suppose one has to trust somebody.

MALCOLM. (Very business-like) Then you'll do it?

ALEXANDER. (Loftily) On the whole, your plan seems as good as any. But there is one request I would like to make.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Anything within reason!
ALEXANDER. (Suddenly going shy) I don't mind being vanquished in deadly combat, you know. But afterward -- I would like to come to the banquet!

MALCOLM. (Looking down the hill, R.) They're coming -- the whole village is coming!

MR. PARTRIDGE. I must get into my armour.

MALCOLM. The Mayor's coming -- and old Larkin. They've penny whistles and balloons. There's Sarah Jingle in her best red skirt! They're all coming! Listen to them sing! (Exit MR. PARTRIDGE and ELAINE., L.)

ALEXANDER. Should I retire? (Re-enter MR. PARTRIDGE, running.)

MR. PARTRIDGE. I say -- you'll do your proper share of the fighting? I mean, ramping and breathing fire? It's expected.

ALEXANDER. I can ramp, all right. As to breathing fire. I'm a bit out of practice, but I'll do the best I can! (Exit MR. PARTRIDGE L.)

MALCOLM. Here comes old Bundy with a rake! And Selina and her young man -- and the parson -- and blacksmith. (To ALEXANDER) You go into the cave and come out when Saint George calls you. They won't have time to admire him if you're around, Quickly!

83 ALEXANDER. (At the door of the cave) You won't forget about the banquet? I am really fond of congenial society!

(SOUNDS of the approaching CROWD are heard, laughter, the warning voices of anxious mothers, and penny whistles blown in shrill excitement. Enter a romping group of CHILDREN from R. over the hill, followed after a little by the town's PEOPLE in holiday attire. Among the number is a lame old

Ready 7 + garden song

GARDNER; a buxom village belle; a bookie with cockney speech, riding clothes; LARKIN, the tavern keeper, in his apron; and the BALLOON MAN. The CHILDREN stop to dance, singing "A Song To Saint George" the while.)

SONG TO SAINT GEORGE

It's of St. George's valour
So loudly let us sing!
St. George the valiant conqueror
Will make the echoes ring.

He's twice the size of common men,
With thews and sinews strong.
Many gory deeds he's done.
We'll sing St. George a song.

It's of St. George's valour
So loudly let us sing!
Oh, hark! His silver trumpet
Will make the echoes ring.

He'll fight the fiery dragon
With glittering sword and spear,
He'll vanquish every monster
And rid us all of fear.

It's of St. George's valour
So loudly let us sing!
St. George the valiant conqueror
Will make the echoes ring.

(As the MAYOR arrives, puffing, in his voluminous robes of state, the CHILDREN stop their dance and they all crowd close to the cave, eager to secure good places to view the combat.)

MAYOR (Puffing) Friends and fellow townspeople. We have come today--
(He would fain deliver himself of a speech, but no one stops talking long enough to listen.)

(Enter REUBEN and MARIA, R.)

MARIA. (Finding MALCOLM) Ah, here you are, lad. I feared you would miss the fight.

REUBEN. Where's Mr. Partridge?

MARIA. Saint George, you should call him this day!

MALCOLM. It's all right. He's getting into his armour!.

LARKIN. (To REUBEN) 'Twas here you saw the fearsome beast?

REUBEN. Sitting there he was. And the sheep huddled in the path.
(REUBEN points out the cave to an awestruck GROUP. One LITTLE BOY ventures close and is drawn back by his MOTHER.)

(Cries of "Here! You come here! Not too near that cave! Make a place for me!" The CROWD makes a circle not too near the cave.)

BOOKIE. (In a cockney whine) Who'll take a few bets on the dragon?

WOMAN. (To MARIA) There's many stayed behind, fearin' the dragon might win after all.

MARIA. (Firmly) Just put your faith in Mr. Partridge!

MALCOLM. (Goes over to the cave and whispers to ALEXANDER) It's a grand audience, Dragon. Everybody's here!

ELAINE. (Enters. She runs up to MALCOLM) He's coming! He looks just like the picture! He's going to sing Saint George's song. You can hear him now!

(MR. PARTRIDGE is heard, off Left, singing, "Here comes I, Saint George!")

BUNDY. (Leaning on his rake) I misdoubt there's a dragon in that cave at all!

OTHERS. (Protesting) You'd doubt the moon. Plain as day, Reuben said.

REUBEN. I saw --

(Enter, L., at this moment, MR. PARTRIDGE. A dramatic silence falls. He is resplendent in the armour of St. George.)

BOOKIE. (In a shrill whisper) Who'll take a few bets on Saint George?

OTHERS. Quiet!

MARIA. Bein't he beautiful?

(18) (MR. PARTRIDGE bows to the MAYOR, and all the THRONG, in the true circus manner, than which there is nothing more knightly in the world today.)

MALCOLM. (Softly to ALEXANDER, within the cave) Now, then, Dragon.

(A low muttering, mingled with snorts, issues from the cave, then a bellowing roar. The circle about the cave widens suddenly -- mothers hold their children fast. A cloud of smoke hides the mouth of the cave. Several spectators start down the hill, among these the old GARDENER, stumbling over his rake.)

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Going boldly up to the mouth of the cave, shouts) I challenge you to mortal combat! Dragon, come forth!

(ALEXANDER prances forth, his bright scales shining, lashing his tail, tearing up turf with his claws, while smoke pours from his nostrils.)

ELAINE. Well done, Dragon!

MALCOLM. (To ELAINE) I didn't know he had it in him!

(MR. PARTRIDGE draws his sword.)

MARIA. Malcolm, you come right here! (MALCOLM comforts his MOTHER.)

(The fight begins. MR. PARTRIDGE moves nimbly about the charging beast. He thrusts. ALEXANDER moves away.)

VOICES. Missed!

ELAINE. (to MALCOLM) I hope the dragon won't get excited and forget. His claws are so enormous!

MALCOLM. I can trust my dragon! If only Mr. Partridge aims straight! Whatever is Alexander up to now?

(With a tremendous roar, the DRAGON ramps about the Center of the circle. The CROWD decreases perceptibly! MR. PARTRIDGE comes over to where MALCOLM stands and whispers.)

MR. PARTRIDGE. (To MALCOLM) Now, don't you be afraid. I've marked the spot exactly.

VOICES. Well done, Dragon! Cut 'is 'ed orf, Mister! (Etc.)

(The TWO FIGHTERS spar in spectacular fashion for some minutes, mid growing excitement. Suddenly MR. PARTRIDGE stands on tiptoe and with a lightning flash of his sword pierces the dragon in the prescribed spot. ALEXANDER, born play-actor that he is, falls to the ground in great spiral curves. MR. PARTRIDGE stands above him, sword held high. The CROWD surges forward, cheering.)

VOICES. The dragon's dead! Long live Saint George! (ALEXANDER raises his head a bit and looks anxiously around. MR. PARTRIDGE rests his sword dramatically on ALEXANDER'S body -- too dramatically! The DRAGON'S feet go up in the air and his paws wave wildly.)

REUBEN. That beast bein't dead!

OTHERS. Aren't you goin' to cut off his head? Down with the beast! Kill him!

MR. PARTRIDGE. No hurry, no hurry. (He nods reassuringly to ALEXANDER) You see, the fact is -- I think vanquishing is quite enough. The dragon

really hasn't done any actual harm to the village -- and now that he knows what's what and who is boss and all --

16
MALCOLM. Tell them he's a good dragon.

MR. PARTRIDGE. Leave it to me. (Aloud) Beheading really does seem unnecessary, if he'll promise to give up his dragon ways and be no more a deadly scourge!

MAYOR. 'Tisn't every village can have a good dragon!

MR. PARTRIDGE. Think of the prestige! Shall I speak to him.

ALL. Aye!

MR. PARTRIDGE. Dragon, thou art vanquished! Dost promise to live within yon cave in peace?

MALCOLM. He will, Mr. Partridge. I know he will.

7
REUBEN. Well, my boy was always wise in dragon ways!

MARIA. Three cheers for Saint George!

(Cheers, during which Mr. PARTRIDGE carefully releases the DRAGON. ALEXANDER rises, with dignity.)

MALCOLM. Three cheers for the dragon! (Somewhat fainter, but altogether satisfactory cheers.)

MAYOR. (Steps out of the throng and clears his throat) Friends and fellow townspeople. We are here today -- (WARN CURTAIN.)

2
LARKIN. Banquet! Let's have the banquet first and speeches afterward! (Loudest cheers of all.)

OTHERS. Banquet! Let's have the banquet!

MAYOR. (Disappointed.) If that is your wish, I will save my few remarks! Mr. Partridge, will you join us in a small banquet? (The MAYOR takes Mr. PARTRIDGE'S arm. The CROWD merrily prepares to leave.)

REUBEN. (Clapping MR. PARTRIDGE on the back) Fought like a true Downs man, Mr. Partridge, like a true Downs man.

SEVERAL SMALL BOYS. Didn't Saint George vanquish the beast!

7
MARIA. Come, Malcolm -- the banquet! (ALEXANDER leans over MALCOLM and whispers a few words.)

MALCOLM. He must have forgotten -- in the excitement, you know. (MALCOLM goes up to MR. PARTRIDGE) Mr. Partridge, haven't you forgotten something?

MR. PARTRIDGE. Bless my soul, I had! Excuse me. (To ALEXANDER) The excitement.

ALEXANDER. Exactly.

MR. PARTRIDGE. (Whispering to the MAYOR) A good dragon -- very sociably inclined -- let bygones be bygones.

MAYOR. Invite the dragon to the banquet? Is it regular?

MALCOLM. Oh, quite!

6
MAYOR. (Bowing low to ALEXANDER) Then we'd be charmed, I'm sure!

MALCOLM. (To ELAINE) My dragon can come to the banquet!

ALEXANDER. (Taking MALCOLM'S arm) Jolly day, isn't it?

MALCOLM. Didn't it go off nicely? And if there's any little verse that comes to your mind, fitting to the occasion, you know.

ALEXANDER. (Firmly) Banquet first -- speeches after!

(They start off R. OTHERS follow. ALL singing St. George's song) CURTAIN.